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THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

THE GROUNDS OF PRESUMPTION¹

THE note of pure skepticism, not mistakable for denial, has always been more distinct in English and in Scotch philosophy than it ever was in German philosophy either before or after Kant, or in French philosophy before or after Comte. In Hume it became dominant, and not for the last time. In Balfour, in 1879, it became the theme of the composition.

A Defense of Philosophic Doubt never had the vogue it deserved, or the consideration which, for the clarification of the human mind, it should have received. It got a bad name at the start, as an attack on inductive science, in particular on evolution, which it was not; and as an apology, which it was not, for the *Thirty-nine Articles*. For the first of these misapprehensions, incompetent reviewing and inattentive reading were to blame. For the second, the author himself was to blame because, inadvertently or unwisely, he used throughout the words "belief" and "faith," colorful with religious connotation, when he should have adhered to the white-light philosophical terms, "assumption," "certitude" and "presumption."

In part, however, the disappointing influence of the book is attributable to the circumstance that it soon went out of print, and for forty years was almost unobtainable. Meanwhile, the tide of ideas ran swift, if not always deep, and threw up a resounding surf. It required moral courage to reissue the *Defense* without other revision than trifling verbal alterations and a few notes, made a long while ago. This was, however, the right thing to do. It saved a significant bench mark from obliteration.

Lord Balfour's major thesis is that not only all speculative philosophy but also all inductive science, observational or experimental, and all historical inference, rest upon assumptions that are unproved and unprovable. These assumptions he calls "ulti-

¹ *A Defence of Philosophic Doubt: Being an Essay on the Foundations of Belief*. By Arthur James Balfour, F. R. S. Member of the Institute of France: Honorary Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge. A new edition. London, Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd. 1921. Pages x + 355.

mate beliefs" and "grounds of belief," using the two expressions interchangeably. He identifies them with "self-evident propositions" (page 4) and tells us in italics that among the "full 'differentia' of ultimate beliefs" is the fact that "we require *no grounds for believing them at all*" (page 7). Grounds of belief are always to be discriminated from the causes, or antecedents, of belief. "The enquiry into the first is psychological, the enquiry into the second is philosophical" (page 5). "It is strictly impossible that any solution of the question 'how come I to believe this' should completely satisfy the demand 'why ought I to believe it'" (page 6). "The business of philosophy is to deal with the grounds, not the causes, of belief" (page 5), but not, of course, to attempt to prove them (page 8). However, "if philosophy is neither to investigate the causes nor to prove the grounds of belief, what . . . is it to do?" Its business, as Lord Balfour apprehends it "is to disengage" the grounds of belief, "to distinguish them from what simulates to be ultimate, and to exhibit them in systematic order."

Demonstration of this thesis is undertaken through a searching and extraordinarily acute examination of empirical logic as set forth by Mill; of the theory of historical inference; of Kantian transcendentalism as restated by Caird; of the argument from general consent, the argument from success in practise and the argument from common sense; of psychological idealism (Berkeley); of the test of inconceivability (Spencer); and of Mr. Spencer's proof of realism. Not many conscientious readers have survived these pages with unscathed doubt that all systems of thought, empirical no less than *a priori*, are built upon unproved and unprovable assumptions.

But tangled up with Lord Balfour's major thesis are minor theses, each of which has crept in as pure assumption. One of them he obviously believes, and would defend. Whether he believes any of the others I am not sure. I am not even sure that he meant to present them. I am sure only that he has neither proved nor eliminated them.

Most obtrusive of these unproven but not eliminated theses is the assumption that in self-evident propositions we find certitude. The inattentive reader probably carries away an impression that Lord Balfour holds this assumption to be true, but I find no incontestable evidence that he does. Somewhat less obtrusive is the assumption, which Lord Balfour unquestionably does believe, that the grounds of belief are themselves beliefs. Least obtrusive, but neither insignificant nor unimportant, is the assumption that the grounds of belief are equivalent to reality, or may be identified with it.

It is precisely upon the issues presented by these assumptions, or minor theses, that philosophy has been engaged throughout the years since the *Defense* was written. The product of criticism and restatement is not inconsiderable. We have a new general philosophy of relativism, and three particular varieties of it, namely, a new logic, a new pragmatism, and a new realism. Over against these we have a new absolutism.

The new relativism has conditioned our self-evident truths. It denies that things which are equal to the same thing are necessarily equal to each other eternally, or that parallel straight lines are necessarily parallel to infinity.

Lord Balfour will, of course, object that if these denials are empirical they are invalid. Einstein and the astronomers could not perturb him. But the new relativism is not bounded by empiricism. It compels us to ask, and, if we can, to answer the question, "To what intelligence is a self-evident proposition equivalent to certitude?" The only answer we can make is, "To an infallible intelligence," and human intelligence is not infallible. So there we are. Our grounds of belief, our ultimate assumptions, are not certainties. They are presumptions only.

Moreover, they are not beliefs. The grounds of presumption are no more beliefs than the grounds of the validity of a contract are beliefs. The grounds of the validity of a contract are the conditions attached. If these are present and fulfilled the contract holds; otherwise it does not. The grounds of presumption are the conditions present and attaching to assumption. They are the adjectives, not the substantives of assumption. They only can convert assumption into presumption.

There are four imperative conditions of presumption, and three of them are adjective factors of self-evident belief. There is no discovery here, unless, possibly, to minds, if there are such, unaware that the self-evident *can* be factorized, and that *no one* factor is adequate. Each of the four conditions at one or another time has been isolated by one or another philosopher as a test or criterion of ultimate truth. Lord Balfour has not overlooked or ignored any. *Seriatim* he has mercilessly scrutinized each and, in its isolation, discredited it. But he has not seen, at least he has given us no occasion to suspect that he has seen, that any one of the four enters as an adjective factor into the self-evident.

To name the adjective factors of the self-evident is presumably enough to obtain recognition of the subsistent relation affirmed. No one whose attention has been called to it is likely to deny it. They are, then, the *insistent*, the *persistent* and the *consistent*.

Nobody calls a proposition self-evident unless it forces itself upon consciousness uninvited. It is intuitive. Nobody calls a proposition self-evident unless, as Spencer, with unnecessary urgency, contended, it persists in consciousness in spite of efforts to evict it. And nobody calls two or more propositions self-evident if they contradict one another.

How, then, can we say that the self-evident is unconditional? And if we admit that it is conditional do we not admit both that the self-evident can be factorized and that its factors are the grounds of its presumptive truth? If so, Lord Balfour, in saying both that the grounds of belief are self-evident propositions, and that we require no grounds at all for believing them, has fallen into the language of contradiction.

The fourth condition of presumption is best approached through further observations. The new logic has not been content with sharpening the edges of categorical discrimination and following the lure of quantification until logic and mathematics have been exposed as one identity masquerading as two demons. It has explored the realms of causation as intrepidly as Mill did and has made a better triangulation than his. The old base lines, "antecedent," "consequent," and "condition," have been abandoned, and the once outstanding peaks, "a cause" and "the cause" appear with diminished altitude. Each is seen now as one factor only of a situation, and "the" is held to mean only relative size, or other importance. A situation conceptually factorized, conceived in terms of its factors, a wood thought of as trees, is thereby logically resolved, the new logic says, into its causes. The factors conceived as integrated, the trees thought of as a wood, are thereby converted logically, the new logic avers, into their effect. Actual (phenomenal) causation is a kinetic process of integration. The cause of a dynamic situation is the kinetic integration of its static and kinetic factors.²

Moreover, the distinction here made between causation logical and causation phenomenal is conceptual only. It has no dynamic existence, a fact so nearly "ultimate" that Lord Balfour might have been expected to take notice of it. He has not adequately done so. His contention that philosophy has to do with the grounds of belief only, and not with the causes of belief he has thrown into relief by ignoring the question whether or in what way causes and grounds are related.

As now conceived, causes and effects are not only equivalent, (they have always been held to be that) and all causes are or have

² Cf. the chapter on "Order and Possibility" in Giddings' *Studies in the Theory of Human Society*, 1922.

been caused (this also, with reservations as to a First Cause, has always been held) but also, effects are not terminal points. Now, this last assumption, oddly, has not always been held, at least not always held in mind. Certain states of mind, and self-evident truths preëminently, if not actually thought of as akin to nirvana, have been dealt with in philosophical discussion as if they were. Yet logically they are not, as, certainly, they are not dynamically. All states of mind, including contemplation, are reaction states, and all, including contemplation, react both logically and dynamically. Insistence, persistence and consistence, therefore, the grounds of presumption, resolve into causation. However, the grounds of assumption (or belief) and the causes of assumption (or belief) are not identical throughout the whole extent of causation. Not all causes of assumption are grounds of assumption; morons unhappily (and notoriously) make assumptions; but all true grounds of assumption are causes of assumption.

We here arrive at the new (or, should we say, at the newest) pragmatism. The grounds of assumption do things. They cause or participate in causing presumption. Presumptions, in turn, cause, or participate in causing further assumptions, conclusions, beliefs, what you will. Pragmatism has seized upon this aspect of assumption. It has taken doing, working, productiveness as its ground of belief.

Carefully defined, productiveness is a ground (one ground) of presumption, but the careful definition is imperative, and the limitation to one plot of ground in four is not removable by logical conveyance. Insistence, persistence and consistence can neither be conveyed nor eliminated, nor, if they seem not to bear fruits of esthetic or moral value, be condemned as unproductive (as the withered fig tree was), unless we are prepared to say that it makes no difference whether the product of presumption is truth, error or obfuscation. If what we demand is truth and more of it, the product of presumption must be a body of truths that hold together. Presumptions must work as working hypotheses that work out. In a word, the product of presumption must be not values, which William James, unhappily, and too many of his earlier disciples were never able to eliminate, but philosophy and science. The whole matter has been put as clearly and tersely as it probably ever will be, by Lord Haldane, who says, "The gap in the foundations of the old beliefs has been largely the result of reflection, and it is not by the stimulation of emotion, but only in further reflection, that there can be hope of filling it up."³

³ *The Reign of Relativity*, page 4.

All this means that assumptions which, being causes, as they necessarily are, of further assumption, are acceptable as presumptions only if the new truths which they yield us are, like our older presumptions, persistent and consistent and resolvable into truths that are insistent. It means further, that each new crop of philosophical and scientific products indefinitely must so qualify, and that all of them must be consistent with the old ones. And this is to say that they must be *projective*. They must be points of a curve, the equation of which is constant. They must be components of a body of coherent truths, insistent, persistent and consistent, throughout the whole extent of experience, past and future.

Accordingly, the fourth ground of presumption is *projection*, which may be defined as consistent philosophical working throughout the range of experience, past and future. As working hypotheses presumptions must turn out to be convertible into both new abstracts and new concretes: new conceptions and new perceptions. This brings us to the new realism.

The old realism was a bootless attempt to eliminate concreteness from reality and to identify reality with abstraction or the abstract. Its merit was that it was an attempt to arrive at consistency. Is color real? No, Lord Balfour says, following the older notions, because it is only a sensation produced by the vibrations of material particles and "the smallest trial is sufficient to convince us that to represent in imagination *uncolored* vibrating atoms is a task altogether beyond our powers" (page 249). Is a lump of ice real? No, because it melts into water. Is water real? No, because it becomes a cloud of steam. Is the cloud of steam real? No, because it disappears in invisible vapor. So, by negation of the negation *ad infinitum* reality became the non-phenomenal. Thence, *facilis descensus*, it became the absolute, the unknowable.

But step by step with this evolution grew relativism, and relativism became katabolic. Without pretending that we could get rid of the unknowable, we balked at the absolute, and turned impatiently from nirvana. Without asking ourselves why, or on what grounds, we first refused to think of reality as the statically persistent, and then permitted ourselves to think of it as the persistently kinetic, the kinetically persistent, the ceaselessly carrying on and producing. Then neo-realism, actual and unabashed, set about self-justification.

Assuming that the old realism had tried most, if not all, of the possible ways of going wrong, and that the error of each lay in exclusion or denial, the new realism turned to inclusiveness. It affirmed that the concrete is real, no less than the abstract. The ice

is real, but as ice it is not total reality. The water and the steam are real, but neither is complete reality. Nor would an infinity of equivalent modes, forms, or manifestations be the whole of reality. There is also the relation of one form or mode to another, throughout the series, and the relation of this relation to the totality of relations, and these relations also are real. Or, to put it all now in other terms, reality is total experience and more. It includes past and future, actual and possible experience and more. That, at least, is how we have to think about it, because we have been driven to assume that all experience is real, in some sense or way, but that we do not know, and may not presume, that human experience exhausts reality.

It follows that conceptions (abstractions) are convertible into concretes (perceptions) and that these, in turn, are convertible into new conceptions, and so on indefinitely. Reality, therefore, to summarize all this in a formula, is not merely a (a concrete) or merely p (an abstraction), or merely x (an unknown): it is $x(a\ p)$, and $x(a\ p)$ must be convertible into $x(b\ q)$ or into $y(a\ p)$ or into $y(b\ q)$.

So, at last, we are brought through these developments of relativism to a corrected view of the nature, functions and relations of philosophy, logic and science. Distinctions are clarified.

Philosophy is concerned with the grounds of presumption, and with ultimate presumptions. Its business is to bring our assumptions, beliefs and faiths face to face, and let those survive that can. The survivors we may not accept as certainties, but we may accept them as presumptions. The strength of presumption increases as the death-rate of beliefs rises.

While philosophy may not confound itself with religious faiths or with esthetic or moral values, nor lose itself in them, it should not ignore them nor let them alone. All of them build upon presumptions. These presumptions philosophy should scrutinize, and pronounce them philosophically valid or invalid, as impartially as it judges the presumptions underlying inductive science. The grounds of judgment are the grounds of presumption which have been considered.

The business of logic is to scrutinize conceptions, and bring about consistency among them. The business of science is to bring about consistency between conceptions and perceptions, between inference (or deduction) and observation.

The new absolutism that has developed in the face of the new relativism has not been so much a product of philosophy, as here defined, as of mathematics. The new mathematicians are adventur-

ing where philosophers now hesitate to tread. I have commented upon their venture in an earlier volume of this JOURNAL.⁴

FRANKLIN H. GIDDINGS.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY.

MEMORY: A TRIPHASE OBJECTIVE ACTION

DEPLORABLE it is that the commendable enterprise of attempting to study the facts of psychology in an objective manner has not developed without regrettable aspects. To mention only one of the unfortunate conditions, why should it be necessary, in order to be objective, to reduce complex human behavior to extremely simple processes? Such a reduction we find in the description of memory as simple habit actions. Accordingly, we attempt in the following paper to make an objective analysis of memorial behavior without transforming such activity into simple processes easily described but not actually constituting a part of human behavior equipment.

I. THE NATURE OF MEMORY REACTIONS

Memory reactions constitute those delayed or postponed responses to stimuli in which (1) the adjustment stimulus is no longer present when the response is made and consequently must be substituted for; that is to say, a substitute stimulus-object or condition must serve to call out the delayed reaction or response phase of the memory behavior, or (2) the stimulus object itself must again be available after some absence. In the latter case, although the absence may be an exceedingly brief one, we must still look upon the effective stimulus-object as a substitute for the adjustment stimulus which in this instance may be the same object but in a different temporal setting.

More definitely may we characterize memory reactions by referring to them as suspended or continuous reactions. Probably the latter description is much more to the point. The fundamental characteristic of true memory reactions is that they start at some period of time, pass through another time interval which is a less active or suspended stage, and are finally brought to completion in a third and active stage. Or when this last part of the reaction does not occur we have the opposite fact, namely, forgetting. The main emphasis in all cases, however, is on the fact of temporal con-

⁴ "The Method of Absolute Posit," this JOURNAL, Vol. XIV, No. 1, January 4, 1917.